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# MEN OF THE SALISBURY PARLIAMENT.

BY HENRY W. LUCY.

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THE premier man in the Parliament which, under curious, though not unprecedented, circumstances, brought Lord Salisbury into power in 1886 is, happily, the Prime Minister. Since Lord Beaconsfield died the Marquis of Salisbury has had no compeer, much less a rival, in the Conservative ranks. It is doubtful whether, for force of character and sheer ability, he was overtopped by his old enemy and later ally. But that is a nice question which future historians, having the supreme advantage of perspective view, may be left to decide. It is enough for the present Parliament to reflect with satisfaction that the Premier of to-day holds his position not alone by title.

In very recent times both houses have known the inconvenience that pertains to the situation when we have had at the head of affairs men placed there rather as a matter of convenience than in submission to personal preëminence. The Lords had for awhile their Duke of Richmond and the Commons their Stafford Northcote, both amiable and, in degree, capable men, but neither a born leader. To Lord Salisbury's preëminence every one gladly pays homage, not the least readily his opponents, for there is nothing more embarrassing in political warfare than that the captain of the opposing host should be other than a man who is not only capable of conceiving a definite line of action, but strong enough to lead his united forces along it.

Lord Salisbury's misfortune in finally coming into a peerage was tempered by his experiences before, by unforeseen chance, he became heir-apparent to the marquisate. If he had been born eldest son, he would have lost distinct advantages by which he has long profited. A younger son, with no reasonable hope of reversion of the title, and, if report be true, not too richly endowed with pocket-money, he at the outset was faced by the necessity

of carving out his own career. It is no secret that at one time he was a working member of the daily press for which he is now accustomed to spare some flashes of his illimitable scorn. Like another keen fighting man, now disguised under the title of Lord Sherbrooke, he wrote articles for the papers, and was glad of the concomitant remuneration. He entered the House of Commons a comparative youth, and even as Lord Robert Cecil made his mark. When he became Lord Cranborne, he, of course, spoke with the added weight of the heir to an historic marquissate. But I have heard old *habitués* of the House of Commons say that for freshness and barb the irresponsible Lord Robert Cecil beat the graver Viscount Cranbourne.

Whether fighting under one name or the other, his pet aversion was Mr. Disraeli, then pushing his way into recognized position in the Tory ranks, under the patronage of the late Lord Derby. The young man hated Mr. Gladstone with the bitter feeling with which a Tory of long lineage regards a champion of the masses; he despised Mr. Disraeli with the lofty scorn of a patrician for an adventurer. When from his seat in the House of Commons he used to assail Mr. Disraeli with "flouts and gibes and sneers,"—his mastery of which arms that statesman on a memorable occasion pointedly acknowledged,—he little dreamt that the time would come when he should share his enemy's homeward journey from Berlin, bringing Peace with Honor; still less that he should sit by his side on the ministerial bench in the House of Lords, an apparently docile, certainly a faithful, lieutenant.

Lord Salisbury's position in English political life, and especially in the House of Lords, is a peculiar one. He is a statesman born out of due season, and that he with increasing skill and success adapts himself to circumstances is crowning proof of his consummate ability. He should have lived in those spacious times when another Cecil was at the head of English affairs. He would have done much more as minister to Queen Elizabeth than he is permitted to accomplish as minister for Queen Victoria. With an almost total absence of sympathy with the people, he has fallen upon a time when the people are more and more, and the crown and its appanages less and less. He is obliged in these days to take into account the House of Commons and what he regards as its vagaries and its prejudices. But he is never at pains to disguise his dislike of it and all it represents.

This is a point on which Mr. Disraeli, with his keen intuition of popular impulses, had the advantage over the friend of his declining years. There is a story told of Lord Melbourne which is probably apochryphal, but if anything like it in analogous circumstances were told of Lord Salisbury, it would readily be believed. It was at the time of the Corn-Law struggle, one of the phases of which had been discussed at a cabinet meeting, other topics intervening before the council broke up. As his colleagues were going away, Lord Melbourne (according to a current story) leaned over the bannisters of the staircase and called out: "Is bread to go up or down? I don't care which it is, you know, but we must all say the same thing in the House."

Just before the first session of 1890 closed, Lord Salisbury, with characteristic contempt for subterfuge, made, in the House of Lords, a speech conceived in the very spirit of this off-hand remark over the bannisters. A bill dealing with local rates, promoted by the corporation of Dublin, had come up from the Commons. It was a measure in charge of the Chief Secretary, and in carrying the bill through the Commons Mr. Balfour had had the unwonted assistance of the Irish members. That was sufficient to excite the ire of noble lords like the Duke of Westminster, the Marquis of Waterford, and Lord Wemyss. At the very last moment they broke into open revolt. The bill had actually been read a third time, and it was on the formal stage "that the bill do pass" that Lord Wemyss moved an amendment which, if carried, would have thrown out the measure. There was a strong whip out, and the malcontent lords mustered in numbers which surely presaged a government defeat. Lord Salisbury, sitting in his favorite attitude, with his elbow on the back of the bench, his head resting on his hand, and his back turned to the bishops, listened to the impassioned debate. Members of the Commons, leaving their own chamber, crowded the bar at the Lords and the galleries over the pens where ladies sit, such of them as were privy councillors availing themselves of their privilege to stand on the steps of the throne. Among these was Mr. Balfour, smiling genially, whilst Lord Wemyss declaimed and Lord Waterford, remaining seated in token of a terrible fall from his horse on the hunting-field, demonstrated how all was up with the Union if this iniquitous bill passed.

To the Commons looking on its fate seemed sealed, and there

was animated talk as to what line Mr. Balfour would take if he were thus openly and studiously flouted. When there appeared nothing left but the division, Lord Salisbury stirred his vast bulk and lounged up to the table. He did not trouble himself with any elaborate defence of the bill. To him it was plainly a ludicrously insignificant thing whether rates were collected in Dublin under one system or another. What he had to point out was that here was an incidental feature in the Irish policy of the government as carried out by Mr. Balfour. Did noble lords approve that policy as a whole or did they not? If they did, and the cheer that resounded through the House gave clear assurance of their feeling in the matter, they must take it as a whole. "You cannot," Lord Salisbury said, "be allowed to pick out a bit here and there, and say you won't have it."

Here was the unconscious echo of Lord Melbourne's remark thrown over the bannister. "Are we," Lord Salisbury said, in effect, "to support Mr. Balfour's policy in Ireland, or are we to desert him and let in home rule and Mr. Gladstone? I don't care which it is, you know, but we must stick to a definite line of action" It is an axiom cynically accepted in Parliament that a speech rarely, if ever, affects votes. On this occasion Lord Salisbury triumphantly proved the exception. Had he been accidentally absent, or, being present, had he refrained from taking part in the debate, the bill would indubitably have been lost. As it was, the carefully-marshalled majority silently melted away, and when the tellers returned from the division lobby the bill was carried.

The delivery of this memorable speech afforded to those fortunate enough to hear it a fair idea of Lord Salisbury's oratorical style. Unlike Mr. Gladstone, the Premier but slightly varies in the level excellence of his speech. Never striking at the high flights at which Mr. Gladstone is accustomed to soar, there is not the opportunity for comparative failure. Lord Salisbury, in addressing the House of Lords, does not make speeches to them. He just talks, but with what clearness of perception, what command of his subject, what vigorous and well-ordered sentences, what irresistible arguments, and now and then with what delicate refreshing rain of cynicism! Doubtless a minister in his position must carefully prepare his speeches on public affairs, but Lord Salisbury has in peculiar degree the art of concealing his art.

He rarely uses manuscript notes even for the exposition of the most delicate and important announcements. Just before Parliament rose last session he had occasion to explain the details of the arrangement concluded with Portugal for the settlement of contending claims with Africa. It was an exceedingly intricate affair, the story involving an historical review and the adjustment of nice points of latitude and longitude, not to mention the recital of barbarous and unfamiliar geographical terms. It was precisely the case in which the most practised speaker would gratefully have taken refuge in a sheaf of notes. But Lord Salisbury had not a scrap of paper in his hand as he unwove the tangled skein, and when he sat down, after talking for twelve minutes, he had made the whole case clear to the perception of the dullest lord in the assembly.

Next to the Premier in the quickly-exhausted list of men who have made their mark in the Salisbury Parliament stands Mr. Balfour. If any member who had sat through a session or two of the Parliament of 1880 had fallen asleep in the library and had, on any night when the present House of Commons is sitting, returned to his old place, he would not know this still slim young gentleman who in Mr. Gladstone's Parliament was member for Hertford. Not that in personal appearance Mr. Balfour is greatly altered. He has at times the same languorous air, the same boyish smile swiftly illumining his countenance, the same disposition to discover how nearly he can sit on his shoulder-blades when occupying a place on the front bench listening to Mr. Gladstone or an Irish member. But in other respects the metamorphosis is complete. The dilettante stripling that used to lounge about the House, moved to what seemed the nearest possible approach to the bore of being interested when Lord Randolph Churchill was attacking somebody, has grown into the hardest-worked minister of the crown, the deviser and stern executor of an Irish policy as nearly Cromwellian as the prejudices of the nineteenth century will permit.

When, on the retirement of Sir Michael Beach in 1887, Mr. Balfour was appointed to the office of Chief Secretary, the arrangement was generally regarded as one of those temporary dispositions of a difficult post which mark the movement of a bewildered premier. Though Mr. Balfour had already a seat in the cabinet as Secretary for Scotland, he had not yet developed any

qualities that gave promise of his immediate future. The Irish members laughed at his pretty ways, inclined to regard his appointment as something like an echo of Mr. Disraeli's practical joke when he made Mr. James Lowther Chief Secretary for Ireland. But before the session closed members were fain to admit that there were unsuspected depths in the character of the young minister. He trod gently as yet, but through the ordeal of the badgering to which chief secretaries are submitted at the question hour he passed with a skill and strength that extorted admiration.

There is no instance in English political life of a still young man making such a rapid advance to a premier place as is supplied in the case of Mr. Balfour. Lord Randolph Churchill had a meteoric flight, but he had been for several sessions steadily forcing himself into prominence before, in the Parliament of 1886, he blossomed into Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House of Commons. Up to the day when all the world wondered to hear that Mr. Balfour had been appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland, he was a person of no political consequence, his rising evoked no interest in the House, and his name would not have drawn a full audience in St. James's Hall. Within twelve months, and in rapidly increasing degree within two years, he had gained for himself one of four principal places in debate in the House of Commons, and his name was one to conjure with in Conservative centres throughout the United Kingdom.

In personal appearance and in manner no one could less resemble Cromwell than the present ruler of Ireland. To look at Mr. Balfour as he glides with undulous stride to his place in the House of Commons, one would imagine rather that he had just dropped in from an exercise on the guitar than from the pursuit of his grim game with the Nationalist forces in Ireland. His movements are of almost womanly grace and his face is fair to look upon. Even when making the bitterest retorts to the enemy opposite, he preserves an outward bearing of almost deferential courtesy. Irish members may, if they please, use the bludgeon of Parliamentary conflict; for him the polished, lightly-poised rapier suffices for all occasions. The very contrast of his unruffled mien presented to furious onslaughts of excitable persons like Mr. W. O'Brien adds to the bitterness of the wormwood and gall which his presence on the treasury bench mixes for Irish members. But if he is hated by the men some of whom he has put in

prison, he is feared and, in some sense, respected. In him is recognized the most perfect living example of the mailed hand under the silken glove.

As Mr. Balfour's earliest appearance on the Parliamentary scene was influenced by Lord Randolph Churchill, it is probable that future stages of his career will be constrained, if not controlled, from the same quarter. If Lord Randolph did not exist, it would not be difficult to cast the political horoscope of the Chief Secretary. He has no other rival in the succession to the leadership of a party who have had in distant succession two such chiefs as Peel and Disraeli. Mr. Balfour is strong in something else than his Parliamentary position. The Conservative party believe in him with a fulness of conviction withheld from Mr. Disraeli even after he had been received into the sanctified company of the House of Lords. Mr. Balfour at least knows what he means and what he intends to do, and that is a great comfort to the large majority of a party who only want to be led. His succession to the leadership on the retirement of Mr. W. H. Smith—an event which cannot long be postponed—would be hailed with approval by nine-tenths of the party in the House of Commons, and with a roar of acclamation by the party throughout the country. That the problem has not already been solved in this direction is due partly to the difficulty of finding a successor capable of continuing his policy in Ireland, and partly to the apprehension of revolt in certain quarters on the treasury bench if other claims were overlooked in favor of the brilliant nephew of the Prime Minister.

But if Mr. Balfour is to obtain this well-deserved promotion over the heads of his colleagues in the cabinet as at present constituted, it will be necessary for the arrangement to be completed during the existence of the present Parliament. As far as its term is concerned, Lord Randolph Churchill's chance is played out. He is, as recent chapters in his history have proved, prone to hasty decisions. But it is too much even for his most sanguine enemy to hope that he will be so ill advised as to yoke himself with the falling fortunes of the present ministry. If, indeed, he were invited to resume the leadership of the House of Commons, with promise of free hand, the invitation might prove irresistible, and its acceptance would be well advised. He could not hope to avert the impending doom, but he would at least make a good fight, and might succeed in making the fall easier.



To take anything less than the leadership at the present juncture would be an act of self-abasement which no one has a right to expect at his hands.

Lord Randolph Churchill is not a man of the Salisbury Parliament in the sense that Mr. Balfour has won that distinction. His position was made in the Parliament of 1880, and was lost in that which is now nearing its close. During the past session Lord Randolph has even ostentatiously withdrawn himself from Parliamentary affairs. He has given up to Newmarket what was meant for mankind. But no one with even elementary knowledge of political affairs, or the slightest acquaintance with Lord Randolph's character, imagines that he is finally out of the running. Though he has flung away ministerial position and withdrawn himself from the councils of his party, his personal weight and influence in debate are not materially impaired. His command over the House, when he chooses to exercise it, is as complete as ever, and his influence in the country may be regained whenever he thinks it worth while to set himself the task. His time will come again when the present government go into opposition and look around them for a leader.

Lord Randolph Churchill is a model leader of opposition; ready, resolute, inventive, audacious, and, if need be, unscrupulous. If it were only possible for Mr. Balfour to work with him in unity, Mr. Gladstone's next ministry would have a sore time, whatever might be their numerical majority. The House of Commons likes to be shown sport, as one of its most successful leaders said. Lord Randolph Churchill and Mr. Balfour working together in harmony on the front opposition bench would show excellent sport. Whether such a combination be possible or not is one of the problems which the near future will be called upon to solve. It does not in present circumstances appear probable, but adversity makes one acquainted with strange bedfellows, and in the gloom of opposition these two old friends may come together again. Two things are, however, already certain. One is that Lord Randolph Churchill will be finally indispensable to the Conservative party; the other, that he cannot hold a second place.

HENRY W. LUCY.